

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee—

My name is Annie Glover, and I am here on behalf of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

The CSKT respectfully opposes HB 214. The bison are of profound cultural and historical significance of the CSKT, as they are of all Montana tribes. The very identity of tribal peoples is intertwined with wild bison, and tribes are absolutely committed to restoring disease-free wild bison to the natural landscape of Montana.

The maintenance of wild bison in Montana is of utmost importance to the CSKT, as it is to all tribes. It is an understatement to say that the buffalo has played a profound role in the CSKT culture, and all the culture and life-ways of all Montana tribes from time immemorial. The buffalo remains a key component of CSKT culture today, and preserves a connection to tribal traditions that date back uncounted generations.

Montana has long recognized that all wildlife are a public resource, including wild bison. While they are on public lands in Montana they are subject to the management and regulation of FWP and are currently hunted as a game species through both FWP and tribal hunting regulations. The CSKT fully supports FWP's continued management and classification of bison as wildlife when they are on public lands in this state. Based on the historical and cultural significance of wild bison to tribal peoples, the CSKT strongly oppose any efforts to privatize this public resource. By reclassifying all wild bison or buffalo in the state, not in captivity or owned by a person, as livestock, HB 214 privatizes this vital public resource.

The CSKT have treaty rights to hunt and fish on off-reservation open and unclaimed lands within their aboriginal territories. This bill limits the opportunities of tribal members to exercise these treaty rights. Hunting rights are irrelevant when the game is not accessible to hunters.

The tribes have joined the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) in good faith, as a government seeking to address shared concerns in cooperation with state and federal governments. Jurisdiction and land issues between tribes and the state will always be complex, and the tribes understand the need to work in cooperation with nontribal neighbors. It is the belief of the CSKT that a balance can be struck, where wild bison can be maintained as a public resource that does not disrupt private livestock interests.

Please support the balanced work of the Interagency Bison Management Plan to both keep Montana brucellosis free as well as restore disease-free wild buffalo to Montana open lands.